

The Incarnation

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(This and the following conferences are from hitherto unpublished notes of the Jesuit educator of whom President Eliot ran foul.)

THE HUMAN RACE

WHAT was the world without Christ? St. Paul in the first chapter of the Epistles to the Romans etches for us in a few mordant verses such a picture of the condition of civilization, at the time the Gospel was first preached there, as the self-restraint of Christian modesty and respect for those he was addressing would permit. It is a picture of that Rome which was the imperial mistress of the world, which was the highest realization the world had ever seen of civil might and majesty—Rome that was the heir of all the civilizations that for 4,000 years had preceded it, that had garnered the philosophies and literature and art of Greece, the wisdom, luxury and refinement of the Orient, the mechanical skill of Egypt, into whose lap poured "the wealth of Ormus and of Ind," whither flocked the artisans, the craft and strength of subject civilizations and whose schools and lecture-halls were filled by the highest exponent of every phase of human thought—Rome the foster-mother and patroness of progress, military prowess, law, refinement, and culture. Of this Rome St. Paul says (Rom. i. 22-31): "For professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. And they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of the image of a corruptible man, and of birds, and of four-footed beasts, and of creeping things. Wherefore God gave them up to the desires of their heart, unto uncleanness, to dishonor their own bodies among themselves. Who changed the truth of God into a lie; and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause

God delivered them up to shameful affections. . . . And as they liked not to have God in their knowledge, God delivered them up to a reprobate sense, to do those things that are not befitting, being filled with all iniquity, malice, fornication, avarice, wickedness; full of envy, murder, contention, deceit, malignity; whisperers, detractors, hateful to God, contumelious, proud, haughty, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, foolish, dissolute, without affection, without fidelity, without mercy." This is a gruesome and repulsive picture of the highest type of pagan civilization, and yet we know from the literature of antiquity that has come down to us that it is not an exaggerated picture; we know that it may be duplicated for every civilization which knew not Christ and whose "people walked in darkness . . . that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death" (Is. ix. 2). Wherever the influence of Christ is not felt, there that fundamental passion that subserves the propagation of the race, becomes an uncontrolled demon, and wherever that passion rules whether in individuals or nations it brings in the train of it brutal self-love and a drying up of all springs of natural affection and justice.

St. Ignatius in words that are not less pregnant than those of St. Paul, depicts another side of that picture. He asks us to look on all the children of Adam now dwelling in various parts of the world, split up into tribes and races, speaking different languages, and living in different ways, scarcely retaining a vestige of their descent from a common father and of their natural brotherhood; some shedding one another's blood in savage warfare, others sunk in the luxurious vices of peace, some buried in the hopeless misery of suffering, others joyously wallowing in the vain pleasures of sin; men born, and living almost from the dawn of reason in sin, and crime, and hopelessness, and dying, close their eyes on a world that brought them no *substantia*' joys, to open them on a world of lost souls. On all sides misery, unhappiness, degradation, woe, despair, until

On that hard pagan world disgust
And secret loathing fell,
Deep weariness and sated lust
Made human life a hell.

Men seemed to be born only to chase the shadows of the good their souls were made for to the brink of the tomb, thence to be plunged in the reality of never ending woe. What was man therefore without the Incarnation? A being whose pride and self-sufficiency were as exalted as his degradation and weakness were profound; whose inhumanity, want of sympathy for the wretched, injustice towards the weak grew daily in proportion as his own need of charity and mercy increased; whose outlook and purpose became more and more restricted to this temporal life in proportion as this life became less and less capable of satisfying the cravings of a rational creature. Such and infinitely worse should we and all our modern world have been, if Christ had not come. Why therefore shall we individually or collectively glory in our civilization and what it signifies? What would we have been without Christ, His Church, His Sacraments?

THE HOLY TRINITY

Consider the decree of the Triune God by which it was ordained from eternity that the Second Person of the God-head should in the fulness of time become man and redeem His fellowmen.

Let us meditate with reverence and intellectual humility on the *reasons* of this decree.

The supreme reason of the Incarnation St. Thomas tells us (S. T., 3, quæst. 1, art. 1 and 2., quæst. 4, art 1.) was the reason of the creation—infinite love desiring to manifest itself. Theologians give reasons of congruity, as they are called, why God having created two orders of beings to His image and likeness, the Angels in heaven and man in an earthly paradise, should, after they had sinned, decree that the Angels should instantly experience the rigor of His justice, and that man, though deserving the same application of justice, should be reprieved, “that the Creator might show the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy” (Rom. ix. 23; cf. Wisd. xiii. 11).

The first reason they assign is that men not by their personal wills but by the disobedience of their first parents were originally made sinners; and that they may therefore, without presumption, base their confidence in God's mercy on two grounds, alleging with David that we

are "the works of Thy hands" (Ps. cxxxvii. 8), and that we were "conceived in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. i. 7).

The second reason they assign is that the Angels fell through their own pride, whereas man was seduced by the devil out of envy of man's condition in Paradise, and through hatred of his Creator, and a desire to frustrate His plans, and that we may therefore ask God in the multitude of His tender mercies to look on our fall as His own defeat, and to have mercy on us lest His enemy should glory in his triumph, and raise his uncrushed head in proud insolence against his Creator.

But these reasons, though they may increase our confidence in God and justify the ways of God to men, give us absolutely no title to an abatement of God's justice; diminish in nothing the infinite magnitude of the mercy by which we were redeemed. The Incarnation in our regard is unqualifiedly a work of mercy. As God in His wisdom wished to vindicate His sanctity by justice towards the rebel Angels, so He wished to diffuse His holiness in mercy towards man (Rom. ix. 15-23).

The goodness and mercy of the Holy Trinity is shown in the plan of redemption. "But not as the offense, so also the gift. For, if by the offense of one, many died; much more the grace of God, and the gift, by the grace of one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many, and where sin abounded, grace did more abound" (Rom. v. 15, 20). To man's pride, desiring to be as gods, having knowledge of good and evil, was to respond the divine condescension making man "a partaker of the divine nature" (2 Pet. i. 4), and bestowing on him through revelation the riches of the wisdom of God; to his unworthiness of pardon was to respond such love and mercy as brought not merely pardon of the original fault, but of all his personal sin and crimes, not merely redemption, but such a benign redemption through a God-Man, as to make his present state, when he wishes to use its graces, far richer and more blessed than it would have been in Eden. Pride is met by infinite condescension, unworthiness by the mercy of infinite love. Compare what man has done against God and what God has done for man, and in your own life what you have done against God and what God has done for you.

CHRIST THE REDEEMER

Consider that by the decree of the Holy Trinity, God the Father so loved the world, *i. e.*, the multitude of degraded sinners in the world, as to send His Son, Who is "the brightness of His glory and the figure of His substance," "the unspotted mirror of God's majesty, and the image of His goodness" (Heb. i. 3, Wisd. vii. 26), to become man "in likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. viii. 3), that we, sinful men, "might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. iv. 4) and be made "partakers of the divinity" (2 Pet. i. 4). This Son was He, "who being in form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man. He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross. For which cause God also hath exalted Him, and hath given Him a name which is above all names: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth: and that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father" (Philip. ii. 6-11). And so God was to redeem us, and Christ was to establish His Kingdom and the reign of peace by two agencies, through the abandonment of which man had forsaken Him and walked in the regions of the shadow of death—by two agencies: humility and love. So too must we, if we are to be soldiers of Christ fighting to extend His Kingdom, put on the virtues of humility and love, disregard of self and love of our neighbor. If we have enlisted especially "to signalize ourselves" in the army of Christ, we must realize that our first duty is to learn and master the principles of our art, its tactics and its strategy. Raw, undisciplined, untrained soldiers, neither in the battles of nations, nor in the battle of God, the great battle of Armageddon, are of service to the leader, rather is their ardor, even a cause of concern, and of danger. Our zeal therefore in Christ's service must begin by the drill and discipline of our own hearts, in learning to forget self, and to love Christ and those for whom Christ died without distinction of person. In the words of John the Baptist, "He must increase but I must decrease" (St. John iii. 30); and in proportion as this viewpoint of St. John becomes

the habitual, instinctive, and universal spring of our thoughts and conduct shall we fight the good fight effectively, shall we win over the enemies of Christ; and in proportion as these virtues, revealed to us at the very councils of God, are wanting, shall our service in the field be fraught with danger to us and of harm and perhaps ruin to others.

We have got to learn the power of lowliness and the strength of love, and to learn that other arms of our warfare, essential as they may be, wisdom, learning, eloquence, the graces of refinement in speech and manners, ability to lead and inspire men—or whatsoever else—will be useless in our hands unless he who wields them is inspired by the primal virtues of the Incarnation—the humility of Christ and divine love.

The Incarnation to the world is a heap of impossibilities: the Creator becomes a creature, God becomes man, the Eternal is born, the Unchangeable suffers, the Immortal dies, the mother remains a virgin. As the old hymn has it:

Fortitudo infirmatur,
Parva fit immensitas,
Liberator alligatur,
Nascitur æternitas.
O quam mira perpetrasti
Jesu, propter hominem,
Tam ardentem quem amasti
Paradisi exulem.

If God by His omnipotence had broken the will of the Angels, restored men, and extorted faith in astonishment, who would not admire His power? But He puts off His power and conquers; He girds Himself with weakness and is victorious; He reigns by His humility; by emptying Himself of His glory, He fills the universe with it; by His poverty He enriches the world; by His death He gives life; by the shame of the Cross, His name is exalted; by enduring its opprobrium He wins admiration and undying reverence; by foolishness He puts down wisdom. In a word He triumphs not by the agencies which the world regards as essential to success; not by the majesty of power, but by the weakness of humility does He plan to overthrow His enemies; not by the strength of His justice, but by the might of His love does He plan to repair

the evil introduced into His creation by the inspiration of Lucifer and the cooperation of our first father. As a means of overturning the vast empire of intrenched pride what more foolish than humility? As a means of crushing the organized hatred of the great Leviathan, which we call the world, what more foolish than love? Yet until these principles of the Incarnation, love of God and of His Christ and those that Christ came to save, and the humility of the Cross become the web and woof of our lives, we shall not be true members of the Kingdom; until we become as St. Paul tells us men "crucified to the world and to whom the world itself is crucified," until we can re-echo in the sincerity of our hearts the cry of St. Paul, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. ii. 14), until our hearts burn with a measure of that divine love by which God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son, "that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but may have life eternal" (St. John iii. 16), we have not truly possessed ourselves of the spirit of the Kingdom. Every time we foster pride in our heart, or drop bitterness from our tongue we are putting back the triumph of the Kingdom and are enemies of Christ. Christ could have redeemed us as a King surrounded by wealth and the splendor of His own world; as a High Priest invested in majesty and grandeur; as a legislator awful with the lightnings of Sinai; but having joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising shame. "The foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the strong. And the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible, hath God chosen, and the things that are not, that He might bring to nought things that are" (1 Cor. i. 27). And by no other means than those which God has chosen may we hope to become true members of His Chivalry.

This is the miracle in the intellectual order of the Incarnation—a miracle of such infinite wisdom, justice, and love that it is a stumbling block to the Gentiles and a scandal to the Jew. In the councils of the Holy Trinity a plan was devised and executed by which the justice of God might be satisfied, and the enemies of God might be superabundantly redeemed. Justice and mercy were so blended

that through the humiliation of the eternal Son reparation should be made, and through the love of God, the culprits and rebels were to be made co-heirs with Christ in an everlasting Kingdom.

OUR BLESSED LADY

Contemplate our Blessed Lady and Angel Gabriel and contrast their words and actions with those of Eve and of the fallen Angel who tempted her. The Redemption is after the form of the Fall; the actors in each are an Angel, a woman and a man.

A rebel Angel and legate of hell announced the primal lie that destroyed Paradise and turned the earth into a vale of exile and misery, a lie that is involved in every sin, the lie that by contempt of God's commandment we shall attain freedom and power, that by independence of Him we shall gain knowledge and happiness. A loyal Angel, Gabriel, "the strength of God," announces the supernal truth on which the supernatural order is reestablished and fallen man enabled to become like unto God, the truth that blessedness consists in union with God. "The Lord is with thee; blessed art thou," he said to Mary, and through her to us. Blessed are we when God is with us, and in proportion as He is with us. In those two messages are contained the conflicting philosophies of Christ and Satan, of grace and sin, of the Church and the world.

As Eve, though not herself the direct agent of the ruin of the human race, was nevertheless by her seduction of Adam most intimately engaged in bringing about that ruin; so too, in like manner, though Christ, the new Adam, is the one Redeemer, Mary, the new Eve, cooperates as closely and intimately in our redemption as the first Eve did in our fall. It was through Eve that sin first disfigured God's visible creation; her soul was the first to be stained by sin, thus fitting her to be instrumental in the overthrow of the supernatural order. It was therefore through Mary that primeval grace should again be introduced into the world; her soul was the first since the fall that was absolutely sinless, and so fitted to be the anti-type of Eve, the helpmate of the second Adam in the work of redemption. We may with the Doctors and Saints of

the Church say more. St. Paul tells us: "Not as the sin, so also the gift," for "where sin abounded, grace did more abound"; and therefore our Blessed Lady is far more closely and intimately connected with our Redemption than Eve was with the Fall. We believe that Christ our Lord, is the author and source of our salvation, and that Mary, as every other creature, works only through the grace and virtue derived from Him, yet the grace and virtue given assigned her an office in the work of redeeming mankind that immeasurably surpassed the share Eve had in effecting our ruin. Contrasting therefore the behavior of Eve toward the serpent and his message from hell with the behavior of Mary toward Gabriel and his message from Heaven, we shall have revealed to us the fundamental principles of conduct on which the morality of the world and morality of Christ are based: pride and exaltation of self in the Garden of Eden, humility and sinking of self through obedience in the holy house of Nazareth.

A new order was to be established in which humanity was to be raised from its guilt, its degradation and its impotence to a dignity higher than that which it lost in Paradise, and yet this was to be effected without abating a jot or tittle of infinite justice. David foresaw the superabundance of this Redemption when he sang: "Praise the Lord, ye children. . . . Blessed be the name of the Lord, from henceforth now and forever. From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, the name of the Lord is worthy of praise . . . raising up the needy from the earth, and lifting up the poor out of the dunghill: that He may place him with princes, with the princes of His people" (Ps. cxii.). Of us in truth it may be said that He has raised us from the earth and lifted us up out of the dunghill to place us with princes of His people. Shall we then be satisfied to bear before the eyes of men this dignity of princes of His people, careless whether our souls are uninformed in the virtues of His princes, whether our actions are motived by the principles of His princes, whether our aims and ambitions are becoming His princes? Do we hope to make ourselves His efficient soldiers and officers by loving the things that the world loves—honor and the applause of men, or by loving the things that Christ loved—humiliation and lowliness? Do we hope to succeed in spreading His rule over men by the methods of the world,

or by His methods? By bitterness and hatred or by love rooted in the senses, or by love fed from the heart of Jesus?

The Nativity

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CÆSAR AUGUSTUS

AGAIN we remark as we did in the mystery of the Incarnation that means least intended to promote providential ends are those used by Providence; that the vices of men, the pride, ambition, arrogance and avarice of Cæsar, the subserviency and cruelty of Cyrenus are used by God to accomplish His purpose; that men plan and execute in folly or through selfishness, and God directs to Divine ends; that men look to the narrow purposes of time and God coordinates their deeds to ampler plans of His choosing; that in human history, whether looked at in large outline or in the smaller compass of personal experience, there are two curious currents, apparently opposed; but the current of human schemes and purposes is always overruled by the Divine purpose, that orders all things to the designs of God. The will of God, says the old pagan Homer, is always being accomplished. The edict of Cæsar Augustus inspired by pomp or vanities is obeyed by Joseph and Mary and by Christ Himself in His mother's womb as though He, the King of kings, were the vassal to an earthly king. Although they are commanded to make this laborious journey for the interests of an earthly ruler, they obey and accomplish the will of the Eternal Father, Who had ordained that His Son should be born in Bethlehem and predicted it through the prophecy of Micheas (v. 2): "And thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda; out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be the ruler of Israel, and His going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity." The Providence of God took the edict of Emperor Augustus as a means to compass the verification of the prophecy. It is strange and consoling that God's work is often, we might say always, done in the trials and adversities that come to His servants from the self-seeking of human agencies.

ST. JOSEPH

Consider St. Joseph, the poor carpenter, on whom, as the head of the family, falls the burden of providing means for the journey. Consider his extra labor and saving; his feeling of anxiety, greater in proportion to his love of our Blessed Lady for whom he would gladly do anything to make her journey a comfort, bearing as she was in her womb the child Jesus; their trials on the journey; his efforts to console and to cheer our Blessed Lady with prospects of decent conveniences of life in Bethlehem where he had many friends and acquaintances; his assurances that all would be right and yet his subsequent advent in Bethlehem wherein he could find no place, because the city was so overcrowded with descendants of David; his visiting his friends and acquaintances seeking shelter for his young wife; his explanations and entreaties; their polite or humiliating refusals. There were many people in the city, all seeking shelter, all ready to pay good prices, better than poor Joseph out of his small purse could pay. If he came at another time they would have gladly received him. So again it was ordained from all eternity that the city should be overcrowded and that Christ should be born in poverty. If the edict had not gone forth, our Blessed Lady might have given birth to her Son at least in circumstances of common comfort and propriety. Consider again the return of poor St. Joseph to our Blessed Lady, dejected and disheartened, able to refrain from breaking down weeping, only because he felt it his duty to be a comfort to our Blessed Lady. They then wandered around hopeless, until he bethought himself of a cave which he knew from boyhood, hesitated for some time, but is finally obliged, with his heart breaking, to offer to her whom he loved and revered dearer than anything on earth, the shelter of an abandoned stable. The humiliation of it all! And yet He whom Mary bore in her womb was Lord and Master of the riches of the world. Oh! the mystery of the sacredness of poverty that should permit this suffering!

OUR BLESSED LADY

The mother of Mary, St. Anne, we are told, was in comfortable circumstances. Why then the poverty of

Mary? St. Joseph, it is true, was poor, supporting himself by the labor of his hands. Was there any necessity of their going to Bethlehem until after the birth of the child? We do not know. Mary knew that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem from Micheas, perhaps from personal revelation. Whatever the causes, the fact is that Christ was in the decrees of God to be born in poverty in Bethlehem; and that earthly circumstances so arranged themselves that this was to be their issue. For this our Blessed Lady was obliged to leave her home and comforts she might have had there, to take so long a journey in such a rigorous season of the year, with such small means, in order that the foundation of the Kingdom of Christ should be laid in poverty. No doubt she suffered interiorly thinking of St. Joseph's misery, as he was thinking of her, and tried to comfort him as gently and delicately as she could. She the daughter of the Royal house of David—the Mother of the Messiah, who was the Expectation of nations for whom the Jewish people had sighed and prayed for 2,000 years—is about to give birth to that Messiah in destitution the most absolute!

JESUS

The first appearance of one destined to great enterprises is, when possible to those with whom they are connected, surrounded by the dignity and pomp indicative of and becoming their station and future influence. When God appeared in the Old Testament, He put on the attributes of majesty. He comes in the New Testament, the Expectation of nations, as a feeble child, born in degrading poverty, in obscurity, the rejected of His people at His birth. Nobody knew Him, His visible court was Joseph and Mary with some few animals; His throne a wooden box used as a manger; straw and some swaddling clothes His robes; cold and darkness His glory. So began the Kingdom of Christ, so was revealed the majesty of our King.

Now whatever we may think, even though we cannot understand it, there is some sacred mystery, some mysterious sanctity about poverty, was then and has been since. Everything was directed by the Providence of God, every circumstance no matter what was its cause, looked at from

a temporal point of view, conveyed, by a fatality that was inevitable, to this one effect that Christ should come into this world without having even the conveniences of the poorest poor. We may say that as He was to redeem the world, He was to be despoiled of what had been the cause of the world's evil, the goods of this world; but the mystery is not solved; we know that His Saints, who knew His spirit, were not merely tolerant of poverty, but sought it, loved it. St. Francis of Assisi called it his Sister and wrote poems to it. St. Ignatius tells his sons that they must love like a mother. How should a mother be loved? There was some inner meaning and beauty about it which he saw and we cannot see.

One thing is too clear to be obscured by the shallowest sophistry; that not by wealth either as individuals or as a body shall we succeed in spreading the Kingdom of Christ; that unless we, as individuals and as communities, practice poverty, we shall not win souls to Christ; that in proportion as each of us individually loves poverty as a mother and practices it, and in proportion as it is the object of our united love and endeavor, shall we reveal Christ to those who are hungering to know Him.

"If you wish to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor and you shall have a treasure in heaven and come follow Me," said Christ to the young man. The spirit of poverty exacted of the young man was first detachment of spirit and secondly the despoiling himself of actual possession; to put his interior conviction into exterior actions, to put the outward symbol and pledge of inward grace, to make his life a sacrament of poverty; and finally to do this for the sake of Christ.

Poverty is the renunciation in will and in deed of all temporal things for the love of God and for the sake of perfection. Three things are required:

1. To put off a desire or affection for temporal goods—this is the principal thing. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." The poor in spirit are detached from what they have and from what they have not. Hence Peter could say: "Behold we have left all things," for he left all desires.

2. To actually dispossess ourselves of them. The first is attained by many holy people in the world; this second belongs to the counsels.

3. To do both for the love of God and the desire of perfection. (a) Things attract because of some perfection communicated to them by the Creator. They are hurtful because they fix our attention on the participation instead of the Author of them. Those who love God reject them and seek the fountain. (b) Christ chose poverty and imposed it as a condition of being His disciples. Therefore it is a good in itself.

A Christmas Contemplation

(Suggested by Faber)

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ONCE more the blessed Christmastide with its hallowed associations is come and, as we re-read the simple yet sublime recital of the Gospel recounting the birth of the God made Man many and beautiful are the thoughts that surge in upon the mind. True they are the old thoughts; still as we dwell upon them at each recurrence of this joyful festival, they seem to take us by surprise as if but for the first time we were thinking on them. In spirit they carry us back to the first Christmas night and as we enter the little cave outside the city of David we catch the echo of celestial strains as the angelic hymn is wafted across the plains of Bethlehem, we behold the Christ-child newly born of the Immaculate Virgin and kneeling worshipfully about the Infant's crib with Mary and Joseph and the devout shepherds each one of us cries out with the liveliest faith and deepest adoration, "My Lord and my God, my Redeemer and my Saviour."

Yet, strange to say, as we contemplate this inspiring scene and recognize that this day is born to us a Saviour, there is mingled with its joy a note of deepest sadness. For side by side with the narrative of the birth of the King of Glory amid angelic songs and heavenly manifestations, we read that when Mary brought forth her first-born Son "she wrapped him up in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn." "*No room for them in the inn!*" Let

us dwell a little on these simple words and try with the help of our Divine Lord, who has come among men to be their Teacher as well as their Saviour, to fathom some of the lessons they contain.

For 4,000 years and more the earth had waited and men prayed for the promised Messiah. He has been the desired of the nations, the hope of the patriarchs, the inspiration of the psalmist's sweetest melodies. At length the weeks foretold by Daniel are accomplished; already for nine months the Word Incarnate has been cradled in the womb of the Virgin Mary and now the time of her delivery is at hand.

It is toward nightfall and the shadows of evening are just beginning to settle on the low roofs of Bethlehem as a poor and unpretentious couple enter the little city. We know them well. Thither have Mary and Joseph come pursuant to a decree of the Roman Emperor that all his subjects should be enrolled, each in his own city, and they were both of the family of David. But thither too have they come pursuant to a higher decree which ages before had ordained that in Bethlehem of Juda should be born in the fulness of time, the Saviour of the world.

There have been many wonderful pictures on this earth. The sorrows and joys of men have brought about many pathetic occurrences while their virtues and vices have led to many catastrophes of the most thrilling dramatic interest. But earth has seldom witnessed such a scene as Mary and Joseph and the Eternal Word wandering that evening in the streets of Bethlehem in search of a lodging. In vain do they strive to get a resting place. Mary and Joseph had expected no doubt to find shelter among their kinsfolk, for though poor they were still of the royal blood, but as they trudged anxiously from one to another of their relatives and friends it was only to encounter bitter disappointment. They are too late. Nor does Joseph meet with better success from the strangers to whom he offers the few shekles that he has, to purchase a lodging for his exhausted spouse so soon to become a mother. At length much against his will the weary traveller has recourse to the common inn. He had hoped not to be forced to go there, for with its coarse associations it was no place for one like Mary,

for one in her condition. Yet even here disappointment was to be the lot of the Holy Family. There was no room for them in the inn. O mystery of mysteries! No room even in the public inn for the Queen of heaven and her royal Son. The city was occupied with other things more important. The imperial officers of the census, the visitors from Rome were the great men then. This obscure group from Nazareth, the carpenter of Galilee, that youthful Mother, that hidden Word, there was no room for them. Here in Bethlehem is the true Cæsar come and there is no room for Him, no recognition of Him.

And Mary and Joseph,—whither shall they turn their steps now? Just outside the city gates they remembered to have passed an abandoned stable some few paces off the road. Thither will they retire. Oh! how keen their anguish as they quit the town and descend the hill. Not that they care about themselves, but each feels for the other, each feels above all for the Babe that is soon to be born.

What words can recount what takes place in that little grotto when midnight strikes in the city of David and is heralded by the watchmen to the guests revelling in its gay homes? The magistrate in Bethlehem would say that at the time of the census a pauper child had been added to the population by a houseless couple who had come from Nazareth, noting perhaps that the couple were of good family but had fallen into poverty. But God's angel would say that one of God's eternal decrees is being accomplished in a most divine and beautiful way and that the invisible King of Glory has come forth to take visible possession of His kingdom not narrower than a universe. They would tell us as the angel told the shepherds on the hillside that same Christmas night: "We bring you tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people for this day is born to you a Saviour who is Christ the Lord in the city of David."

How sad this aspect of our Saviour's birth! Truly "He came unto His own and His own received Him not." And yet all the while He was God. To all, the world makes no difficulty of a twofold hospitality, places wherein to be born and to die, to come into the world and to go out of it. But how does it treat its Creator in both these respects? So far as men were concerned it

was as much as He could do to obtain a visible foothold on the earth. He had to be born outside the walls of Bethlehem, the city of His royal ancestors, as He would die thirty-three years later outside of the walls of Jerusalem, "the outcast of the people, a worm and no man." An old cavity in the earth was to furnish Him His first shelter for though oriental hospitality is common as the flowers of the field, it would seem that even the commonest services are more than God is expected to demand. "The birds of the air have their nests," He might say, "and the foxes their holes, but the Son of Man hath not whereon to lay His head."

Who can contemplate unmoved that pitiable spectacle of the first Christmas night? Yet one must not stop at mere sentiments of sympathy for the sufferings of the Holy Family or of regret for the inhospitality with which the pleasure-loving Bethlehemites received the long-expected Messiah. Every day of the year, every hour of the day Jesus is coming to us. "Behold," He says, "I stand at the door and knock." Now it is by the inspirations of His divine grace impelling us to avoid sin and lead a life of virtue; now it is by some cross, some sickness, some sorrow, some financial worry sent by Him to wean our hearts from earth and draw them heavenwards: now it is by the words that flow to us through the lips of His ministers; "He that heareth you heareth me." Again Jesus comes to us in the poor, the afflicted, the sick and the sorrowful, the orphan and the widow, whom He would have us cheer and encourage and help according to our means, telling us that "whatsoever you do to the least of these my brethren you do it unto me." Above all, He comes to us in the Blessed Sacrament asking us to make His stay upon our altars more pleasant by the affection we show him, by the love and frequency with which we visit Him, by the fervor and devotion with which we receive Him into our hearts.

Truly Jesus is with us all days but let it not be said that we have no room for Him, that He comes unto His own and His own receive Him not, for indeed Catholics are more truly His own than were the people of Bethlehem. Shall it be said that we are so engrossed with the world and its allurements, with business, with pleasure and with the acquisition of wealth as to have no place

in our hearts for God's inspirations, no time for the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, no room for the Blessed Sacrament in our daily lives?

O if with a lively faith we would only recognize these daily visits of our Saviour, how much more blessed, how much more happy we would be! Then indeed would every day of the year be a Christmas for us and for those with whom we come in contact. Having Jesus with us we ourselves would enjoy that peace which the world cannot give but which belongs to men of good will, and we would scatter it broadcast wherever we went, making our fellowmen happier and holier for their intercourse with us and thus giving glory to God as the angels sang at Bethlehem, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will." Then would our lives be truly one very merry, very happy Christmas.

Preparation for Christmas

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AS we look out into the world at this season of the year we notice on every hand legions of men, women and children in the heat of preparation for the Christmas holidays. We see the Christmas cards and the illustrated Christmas magazines, the sweet-meats and all the glory of the shops; for these the toilers in their thousands are preparing night and day.

While, therefore, so many are at work to make the world's Christmas a merry one, would it not be unjust if the Christian, the true friend of Jesus, whose soul should ever be knit with the soul of heaven, were to remain idle? To whom does Christmas so truly belong as to Him whose name it bears, and from whom alone its happiness can come? Can we lose sight of the fact that it is in our power to make His Christmas happier? This then needs preparation also. Let us try, while there is time, to make of Christmas a true feast for the Sacred Heart of the Holy Babe of Bethlehem.

Holy Mother Church, unremitting in her efforts to develop in the hearts of her children the imitation of

the Divine Model, to prepare us for Christmas, makes prayer and the longing advent wail, to the prelude the pure gladness of the angels' song in the watches of the night on Judea's hills. If ever the kindness of God appeared visible in this world, it certainly was at the first Christmas. For when we were His enemies, and were lost, One came from His throne in heaven and, taking the form of a servant, became little and poor, with a heart meek and humble, and was laid upon the straw in the manger on the Christmas night; and afterwards, for us, gave His life, His body and His blood. "God," indeed, "is charity," and "Charity is kind."

If the kindness of God is to appear in our lives this coming Christmas, then let us begin even now to prepare. Let us take example by the poor shepherds, so that, by fervent union of heart before the crib, each one's charity may derive fresh ardor. We may, then, hope that Jesus will make Himself known to us also. And lastly, let us be mindful of Christ's poor, and our Christmas joy will be more joyous in that memory.

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